

Testimony

of

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before the

**House Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife & Oceans
Committee on Resources
U.S. House of Representatives**

regarding the

H.R. 50, To reauthorize the African Elephant Conservation Act and the Rhinoceros and Tiger Conservation Act of 1994, the "*Multinational Species Conservation Funds Reauthorization Act of 2000*"

and

H.R. 465, To reauthorize the African Elephant Conservation Act of 1997, the "*African Elephant Conservation Reauthorization Act of 2007*."

March 13, 2007

Madame Chairwoman, Members of the Subcommittee: Thank you very much for the opportunity to comment on the reauthorization of the *African Elephant Conservation Act*. I am here today to represent my personal views and I am sure those of many of my friends and colleagues on the African Continent who could not be with us here today.

Back in 1991 I started a project in northern Republic of Congo with a guy named Richard Ruggiero, now the Fish and Wildlife Service Chief of the Branch of Near East, South Asia and Africa. At the time French and German logging companies were making huge inroads into these virgin forests to exploit their rich stands of mahogany. These forests contained some of the most fantastic wildlife the world has ever seen, they teamed with gorillas, chimpanzees and tens of thousands of forest elephants. When we first showed up at a logging camp and began talking to the loggers about conservation they laughed at us, they thought that was one of the funniest things they had ever heard. Not only were they personally killing forest elephants with tusks of over 50 kg but they were paying their employees with shot gun and high-powered rifle shells. It was kind of your typical wild-west frontier and we were trying to act like the environmental Wyatt Earps. Our objective was to create a national park as big as Yellowstone right in the middle of their logging zones and we were not their friends.

Of course we needed money and I had run across this guy named Ken Stansell. He was in charge of this thing called the African Elephant Conservation Fund. We sent him a proposal for funds to purchase an airplane to do aerial surveillance over these vast forests. Our idea was to cover an area as big as Alaska flying a few hundred feet above the forest canopy looking at clearings to establish where there were concentrations of elephants, where poaching might be out of control, where logging was making inroads and where we might create even more protected areas. Ken received our proposal and first asked if we were crazy and second if we had any experience doing this kind of flying. We answered yes and then no, because anybody who had that kind of flying experience would you would have to be crazy. After a lot of discussion and justification the USFWS awarded us a grant of xxx to purchase and operate this aircraft for elephant conservation. Richard's brother George was a crew chief on a Huey in Vietnam and airplane buff. He found us a ex-CIA plane that had served in Nicaragua and ended up in a container in Belgium with a bunch of bullet holes in it that we completely rebuilt. By 1996 that plane was being used intensively over the forests and it opened up a world that we would have never discovered without it. We started developing techniques for aerial videography and forest monitoring. We pieced together a conservation strategy for the forest zone and we started working closely with logging companies, esp. in designing where roads might go, how to manage wildlife and how we could make conservation happen with them. In 1996 we did a survey in western Congo in a place called Odzala National Park. We found well over 100 clearings in the north of the park with lots of sign of elephants. Returning to our base I flew over a clearing called Mouadje and found over 100 carcasses of elephants. I contacted the govt. and we flew a Russian helicopter into the clearing with the military and forestry officials. News spread and there was huge international coverage of the massacre by the media. The Minister was mad but helped

us get poaching under control. That was the start of a process of working with the EU to secure Mouadje which we succeeded in doing.

Today wildlife management is mainstream in logging operations, Mouadje is still free of poaching and northern Congo still has good populations of forest elephants and we succeeded in convincing these governments to create a string of parks about the size of ten Yellowstones. Not so say we haven't seen a lot of losses, and that we have done enough, because we haven't even come close, but I shudder to think what could have happened. That aircraft, 12 years later is still working hard for conservation, now in Tanzania.

We have another aircraft now, a brand new Cessna 182 given to us by a donor because they have seen how effective a tool our first one has been for conservation. If you take a look at the latest issue of the National Geographic you will see that we discovered, using a grant from a grant to the African Elephant Conservation Fund, yet another major elephant massacre recently, this time around Zakouma National Park in Tchad. We are working closely with the European Union on this, have just had a visit to the Zakouma National Park by President Deby because of the massacre. President Deby has promised troops and arms because he recognizes that this is not only an issue of poaching but one of security for the entire region. We have already raised about \$90,000 from other donors for a plane that will be dedicated to Zakouma National Park and to support additional guard patrols for wet season operations there, thus helping to secure a large piece of real estate in a very volatile part of the world just 100 miles east of Darfur. In 1984 I wrote a paper with Richard Ruggiero called Poaching and Antipoaching in Manovo Gounda Saint Floris National Park, just south of Zakouma National Park. We were in the heat of the ivory wars and those very people we call the Janjaweed today were coming in large caravans from Sudan, slaughtering tens of thousands of elephants. We had little support to stem the tide except unofficial help from French foreign legionnaires. We urged very strongly in that paper that the world solve this problem because when these Arab horsemen ran out of elephants to kill we predicted they would start on people. By the time the sale of ivory was banned in 1989 we had lost over 100,000 elephants in this area and a couple of million antelope. Three months ago the French bombed the northern part of Manovo Gounda St. Floris National Park to chase rebels and Janjaweed from the area where they have now displaced tens of thousands of people as the chaos of Darfur spills over into CAR and Chad. If we had invested in solving this poaching problem in the 1980s I believe we would not see the crises we do today in that area. And believe me those problems are spreading and it behooves us to work hard to bring stability to Zakouma National Park and the areas around it.

Just last week a returned from Southern Sudan. Again using funds from the African Elephant Conservation fund, we have completed a survey over an area that size of Alaska that has not been censused since the war broke between the Arabs and Africans in 1983. To our great surprise we discovered, not only that elephants have survived in large numbers east of the Nile, and been massacred where they have been exposed to the Janjaweed west of the Nile for the past 20 years, but that Southern Sudan contains what is probably the largest migration of large mammals left on earth. There may be well over 2

million antelope roaming the plains of eastern Southern Sudan and nobody knew. We have also discovered that Moldovan and Chinese oil companies are making huge inroads and seriously threatening the Sudd, the largest freshwater swamp on earth. We also collected extensive data on the resettlement patterns of IDPs and the ecology of those movements not observed by others and have a good grasp on landscape trends and human ecology that not the United Nations nor the US nor the Southern Sudanese govt. possessed until now. The Wildlife Conservation Society will be signing a major agreement with the Southern Sudanese in the coming two weeks to help safeguard their natural resource base from predatory resource exploitation by international interests that may not have their at heart, uncontrolled poaching and wasteful land use practices. Surely we will be there working slowly but surely with the people of Southern Sudan for some decades to develop sustainable livelihoods there during a very volatile time.

The African Elephant Conservation Fund has funded cutting edge projects that have catalyzed conservation action all over the continent for well over a decade. It is a very lean, extremely efficient and targeted program run by people like Richard Ruggiero who has decades of experience under his belt dealing with front lines conservation issues on the Continent. They fund folks who live on the landscape, understand land use problems, and get the job done over decades. The program has enormous ancillary benefits not only for general conservation and natural resource management in Africa but it adds considerably to Africa's ability to provide secure futures for its human populations.

You may have read that elephants are doing so well on the Continent that in South Africa they are culling them, so why should we fund this program? That would be like saying apartheid is behind us, South Africa is at peace, so we don't need to fund security on the African Continent anymore. Just like the DOD is setting up an Africa Command we need to be doing more, not less for natural resource management in Africa.

Just about every African I have met in the last thirty years in Africa depends directly on the natural resource base every day to provide their basic human needs. Without stable, sustainable production of the bounty of Earth, there can be no security. Helping Africans manage their natural resource underlies almost every other problem on the Continent. The African Elephant Conservation Fund is one of our front line tools in combating ecological degradation on the planet which demonstrates great foresight as a nation. If you look at the portfolio of the projects that this fund has supported since it began and imagine the scenarios that could have been had we not, we might find that the forest elephant was extinct, and a cascade of other natural resource problems may have arisen in the region, it is impossible to say. Bang for the buck the African Elephant Conservation Fund it is one of our most cost effective programs that the US Govt. funds internationally and should not only continue but be increased.

The issue of elephant conservation is symbolic. Not only are they a keystone species, they have been a centerpiece in the discussion of the wise management of natural resources on the continent for over a century. The contribution of the US to this debate is well known and respected throughout Africa. The African Elephant Conservation Fund helps shape natural resource policy on the continent, this is evident in the debates already

circling the next CITES Convention of Parties. The bottom line for me is that I believe that the US govt. is being extremely short-sighted in its lack of support for natural resource management generally and that we are sitting here today justifying this program surprises me. It was Teddy Roosevelt who said:

"In utilizing and conserving the natural resources of the Nation, the one characteristic more essential than any other is foresight.... The conservation of our natural resources and their proper use constitute the fundamental problem which underlies almost every other problem of our national life."

If I was seeking the solution to peace and security on Earth and had a choice between providing another 100 billion dollars for Iraq, or to provide the same amount for conservation, especially with no strings attached, I would not have to think twice. Instead, it seems, the US Congress is about to halve the mere 150 million dollars that we spend worldwide for conservation. My sincere hope is that very soon, instead of reading that our government is ordering U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service employees not to talk about climate change, sea ice and polar bears while on foreign visits, that we will read that the African Elephant Conservation Fund and other programs they manage are fully funded, growing and multiplying, because, we recognize that the conservation of natural resources and their proper use are a fundamental problem that underlies almost every other problem we face on this planet. Given the enormity of the great challenges that face humanity in this century, and the obvious need for substantial investments in conservation, I urge the Subcommittee and the Congress as a whole to act quickly and positively on the reauthorization of these acts.

I thank you again for the opportunity to comment and to work with you on these bills. I would be happy to answer any questions.